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Halfway between a whale and a squadron bomber sublimity and the bow chime

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Halfway Between a Whale and a Squadron Bomber: Sublimity and the Bow Chime

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Abstract

This thesis examines the relationship between the sound of a certain playable sound-sculpture, the bow chime, and the notion of the sublime. Noted by many critics for its power and profundity, the sound of this late 1960s invention perhaps epitomises the idea of a so-called “sublime experience”: it prompts an unnerving moment; a moment that unsettles and overwhelms its listeners; an experience in which words fail and all points of comparison disappear. Drawing upon the ideas of philosophers such as Edmund Burke, Immanuel Kant, and Jean-François Lyotard, this thesis attempts to sketch out a few of the processes through which such feelings of sublimity may arise in the encounter with this sound. The discussion is specifically centred around three of the author's experiences, each of which focuses on common characteristics of the bow chime's sound. Overall, this thesis will form three proposals as to the nature of the bow chime's sublimity, which concern, respectively, the terror of the sound's intense loudness, the unimaginable nature of its prolonged duration, and the 'strangeness' of its timbre.

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Acknowledgements

To my immediate collaborators I owe a great debt of gratitude for countless stimulating discussions and practical collaborations with the bow chime. In particular I wish to thank Wolfram Spyra and Adrian Palka, who have both nurtured my interest in the bow chime, and who have offered to me many an opportunity to perform alongside them. I wish also to thank Anne Cranny-Francis and Martyn Lee, for their tuition in the earlier stages of the work. Most of all, though, I would like to thank Julian Hellaby, for his valuable guidance and commentaries on the current text.

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Introduction.

> Oh that sound. It's the sound the Earth makes when it's happy, the sound of the world turning, the sound of Om, the mystic underscore of creation, the music of the spheres. Imagine the foghorn of the *Queen Mary* become angelic. Imagine the richest deep bell you've ever heard, with its vibrating stacks of overtones in perfect fourths and fifths and octaves from the main chime; then deepen it until in your imagination it sounds like the chime of the universe.
>
> (Robb, 2005: 2).

The introduction.

In this quote, music critic Christina Robb attempts to convey the experience that she felt hearing the sound generated by a playable sound-sculpture named the bow chime. Perhaps by any standard, the words she chooses to use here are unusual. Her descriptions seem to slip out of – or perhaps even abandon – all conventional terms of musical and/or acoustic articulation, with her preference instead being, references to the conditions and determinations of nature ('the sound of the world turning'), the divine ('the foghorn of the *Queen Mary* become angelic'), and the mystical ('the music of the spheres'). In such a way, Robb seems to invite the reader to consider this sound as something exceptionally rare, unusual, and 'out of the ordinary'. As well, her words perhaps also indicate – to me at least – that she found this sound to be something of compelling, unnerving beauty.

When I use the word 'beauty' here though, I use the term in no ordinary sense. I am referring to a beauty far from ordinary; a beauty that perhaps defies the very margins of 'the beautiful'; a beauty that, indeed, enters a space where the very term 'beautiful' begins to seem unsatisfactory. To me, Robb's statement suggests, if you like, a beauty beyond the beautiful; it suggests something greater and more profound than the beautiful. It suggests something not simply pleasing – as we might normally associate with a thing of beauty – but awe-inspiring, magnificent, and astounding. Indeed, the closest that I am able to come in description to such a beauty is with another term altogether: 'sublime'.

The sublime.

So what is the meaning of the word 'sublime'? What kind of a feeling does the term express? And what does a moment of so-called 'sublimity' entail? We may be well familiar with the word 'sublime' as the term is used in colloquial English: that is, as a

vague superlative used to express surprise and admiration. We may be less familiar, though, with the term's usage in the more specific realms of philosophy, literary studies, art history and cultural criticism; fields in which the word 'sublime' and the idea connoted by it has a varied range of more specific applications and meanings. In such domains, the notion of 'the sublime' in fact represents a long-standing area of theoretical debate; an area of debate that extends back hundreds of years to an aesthetic treatise usually attributed to an ancient Greek critic, Dionysius Longinus (See Longinus, 1965). So in these fields, what meaning does the word 'sublime' express?

Typically, the terms 'sublimity' and the 'sublime' are taken to refer to a 'rush' of intense aesthetic pleasure; a pleasure that is often taken to paradoxically stem from the displeasure associated with fear, horror or pain; and which is usually considered to be prompted by powerful and overwhelming experiences. In contrast to other aesthetic categories such as the beautiful, the sublime is thus dark, profound, and overwhelming; it represents a divisive force that encourages feelings of difference and deference (Shaw, 2006: 9). The sublime, as such, describes encounters with such things as the rugged, the forceful, the wild, and the primitive. As well, it articulates the taste for such things as ruins, for the alpine, for storms, for deserts and oceans, for the supernatural, and for the shocking.

It is in this sense, then, that I use the word 'sublime' as an articulation of Robb's experience. Her words suggest – to me at least – that she felt the sound of the bow chime to be something beyond the merely beautiful; that she felt the sound to be something compelling, powerful and profound; that she felt the sound to be sublime. It is such an experience of sublimity, as prompted by the sound of the bow chime, that this thesis shall consider.

The aim.

It is the intention of this project to examine how the sound generated by the bow chime relates to the notion of the sublime; and to achieve this task, in this thesis I will sketch out a few of the processes through which sublimity may arise in the experience of the bow chime's sound.

This discussion, specifically, shall be centred around three experiential case studies. Each case study has been drawn from my own particular experiences with this sound; and each directly concerns some significant aspect of it. Throughout the thesis, the distinctive traits detailed in each case study will be linked to the ideas of a select number of philosophers – namely, Edmund Burke, Immanuel Kant, and Jean-François Lyotard – who have each conducted theoretical enquiries into the nature of the sublime moment. This investigation will comprise three main discussions; each discussion of which will concern itself with one case study, with each focusing its attention upon one philosopher's ideas as to the nature of the sublime, as well as, an explanation detailing how those ideas relate to the bow chime and its sound.

Given that each one of these main discussions shall review in quite some depth the finer mechanics of a particular kind of sublimity and its sublime moment, I will abstain from providing beforehand anything other than a more overall introduction to the subject

of the sublime. Before proceeding with even this task though, it is first necessary to offer an introduction to the bow chime itself. In the following section, I will thus outline the history of the bow chime, noting a couple of points about its performance history, its social and (art-)historical context and other such matters. As well, I shall review what other commentators have previously written about it.

1

An Introduction to the Bow Chime.

> Sail-like pieces of gleaming metal supported by frames which wrap themselves around steel rods produce eerie, diaphanous, sensuous, hovering ambiences, [the] sounds of squadron bombers flying overhead, [and] of whales communicating undersea.
>
> (Anon1, 2005).

Robert Rutman and the bow chime.

The bow chime – and its sister instrument, the steel cello – arose following a collaboration between artists Robert (Bob) Rutman and Constance Demby in Rutman's New York gallery in the late 1960s. Rutman was a painter and Demby a multimedia artist with musical training, both of whom were collaborating on a multimedia 'happening'[1] entitled *Space Mass* in 1967.

"Following a chance encounter with a sheet of scrap metal on a piece of New York waste ground [beforehand], it was incorporated into [Space Mass as a] ... projection screen and percussion instrument" (Palka, 2006: 3), its full range of sonic qualities only to be discovered later. As Rutman explains in a documentary surveying the history of both of his sound-sculptures: "They were accidental instruments … we attached [the scrap sheets of steel] to the floor and the ceiling and … welded [on] steel rods … We [initially] thought [hitting the rods] would sound good as a xylophone, but it didn't … so we started bowing them, and that's where the sound really came from" (Rutman, in Palka and Chapman, 2005). Similarly, Demby alludes to the chance discovery of the resonances of steel, suggesting: "I was about to torch a big piece of sheet metal ... but the roar of the sheet made my torch stop in mid-air, and thus was borne the first version of the Sonic Steel Instruments, a primitive thunder sheet" (Demby, 2006).

Both artists thereafter "took time and the involvement of others to perfect the final product, which in Demby's case took the final form … [of] the 'Whale Sail' and 'The Space Bass' and in Rutman's the 'Steel Cello' and [the subject of this study, the] 'bow

[1]As developed by artist Allan Kaprow, a 'happening' could be defined as "a non-verbal, theatrical production that abandons stage-audience structure as well as the usual plot or narrative line of traditional theatre. Although a compartmented organization may be used, the performers are considered as objects – often kinaesthetically involved – with an overall design of environment, timing, sound, colour and light. Found objects are often used and built upon, but the events are not causally arrived at, nor are they entirely accidental and spontaneous" (Kaprow, 1966).

chime'" (Palka, 2006: 4). Rutman's steel cello could be described as a 3x8 ft. sheet of stainless steel suspended from a stand to form a vertical curve. It supports a single string that when bowed produces a range of resonances (see figure i. below). The bow chime, alternatively, features a similar stainless sheet suspended horizontally on a "T" shaped frame. The horizontal bar of this frame also supports a number of steel rods, which are similarly bowed to produce usually low resonances and drones (see figure ii. below).

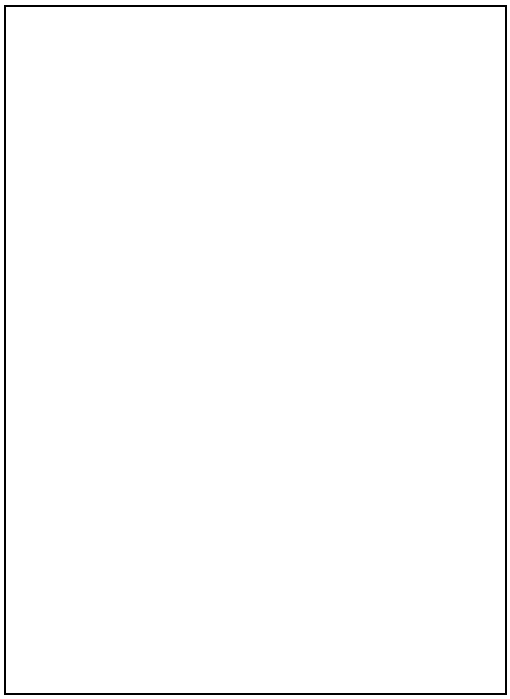

Figure i. The steel cello (Rutman, 1979).

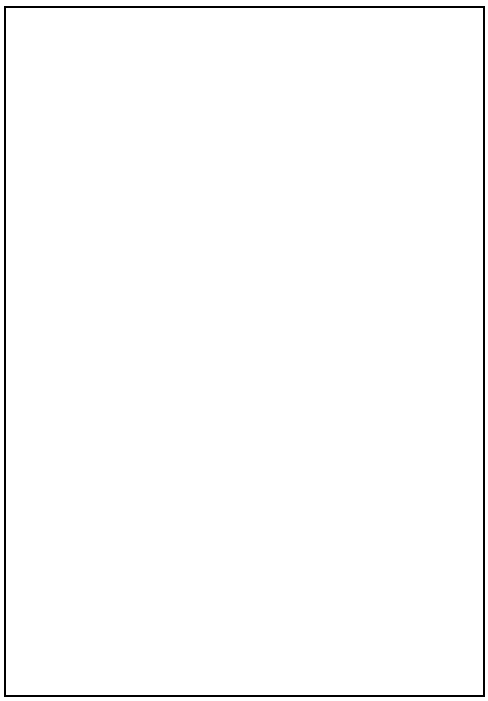

Figure ii. The Bow Chime (Rutman, 1979).

For both Rutman and Demby, the "chance discovery of the sonic qualities of scrap steel in the late 1960s marked the inception of their careers with sound sculpture which continue to this day" (Palka, 2006: 4). Initially incorporated into multimedia 'happenings', Rutman and his sound-sculptures "have had a rich career spanning a wide range of artistic genres, collaborations and sites" (ibid). These have included high-profile collaborations with internationally acclaimed artists such as Merce Cunningham, Peter Sellars, Heiner Goebbels, and Einsturzende Neubauten.[2] Also, his sound-sculptures have been used in performances of great classics by "Shakespeare, Euripides, Rilke, Coleridge; in established institutions ranging from MOMA in New York, the ICA London, the Palace of Culture in Warsaw, as well as in site-specific and experimental environments such as the Tiergarten road tunnel in Berlin and with experimental instruments such as theramins and pyrophones" (ibid: 2).

More recently, Rutman's lineage has also spawned a number of second and even third generation practitioners – each of which has further developed Rutman's creations and the way they are utilised in performance. This point is illustrated in a recent DVD

[2]For more information on these works, see: 'Merce Cunningham Dance Company with Robert Rutman' (Anon3, 2005); 'King Lear (Dir. Peter Sellars)' (Anon4, 2005); *Heiner Goebbels: Walden* (Goebbels, 1998); and 'Einsturzende Neubauten: Where the Metal Really is Metal' (Parales, 2005).

documentary surveying the performance history of Rutman's sound-sculptures that, in addition to Rutman, interviews two second-generation practitioners, Adrian Palka and Wolfram Spyra, who both describe areas of performance far removed from Rutman's (see Palka and Chapman, 2005).

The growing interest in both the bow chime and steel cello is perhaps significant as it indicates that Rutman's creations can now "be legitimately accepted as new musical instruments with the potential for a dedicated repertoire" (Palka, 2006: 3). This is a point perhaps also signalled by the emergence of a number of, what we might call, 'repertoire' pieces: Rutman's *Song of the Steel Cello*, and *Dresden*; Palka and Spyra's *Dislocation*; Goebbels' *Walden*.[3] As well, this point is highlighted further still by the inclusion of the steel cello and bow chime both in Bart Hopkin's book, *Musical Instrument Design: Practical Information for Instrument Making* (1996), as well as in a small number of more academically-minded texts. I will review the main texts of interest below.

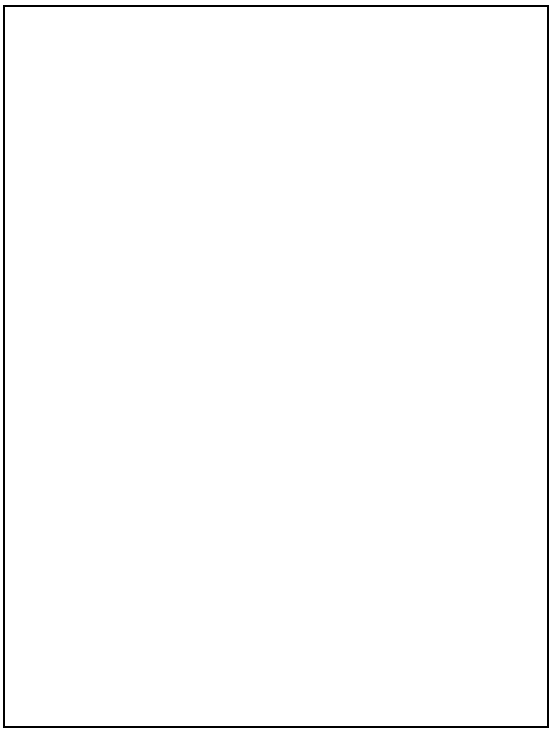

Figure iii. Rutman performing on the steel cello in the late 1970s (Rutman, 1979).

Literature Review.

Though Rutman, over the years, has received many a mention in journalistic reviews and the like (see Johnson, 2005; O'Connor, 2005; Robb, 2005), and has even been the subject of a short documentary film (Palka and Chapman, 2005), the amount of academic literature concerning the bow chime remains modest. In fact, excluding journalistic reviews and other such publications, the academic interest in the bow chime amounts simply to the work of two figures: David Chapman (2003), and Adrian Palka

[3]Rutman's *Song of the Steel Cello* can be heard on his album, *1939* (1998). The other pieces noted here, at the time of writing, remain unpublished in a recorded format.

(2006).

In the remainder of this section, I shall offer a brief overview of Chapman's and Palka's work, with the intention of addressing a number of questions concerning my own: How do the views and intentions of the existing literary contributions concerning the bow chime compare with those of my own in this work? Has anyone else viewed the bow chime in terms of the sublime? Is there even a suggestion of the sublime or related idea in any of the existent literature? Furthermore, does my approach to the bow chime represent a logical extension to the previous writing on the subject?

I shall begin this review surveying the work of Chapman, which takes the form of a short paper entitled *From Object to Instrument; the ambiguity of sound-sculpture* (2003).[4]

Chapman's initial concern in this paper lies with issues of categorisation. Specifically, how we might categorise 'sound-sculpture' as an artistic endeavour. At the opening of the paper, Chapman uses a case study of the steel cello and bow chime to suggest the notion of sound-sculpture as a hybrid form that traverses the realms of traditional categorisation. "The element of sound", Chapman remarks, "brings to sculpture a time-based dimension and a relationship with acoustic space, which is denied to the traditional sculptural object" (Chapman, 2003: 2). Because of this, the bow chime and steel cello, and indeed, any other objects that have been labelled as 'sound-sculptures', are intrinsically interdisciplinary and "in their performance history [provoke] a complex set of interactions which have traversed visual art, architecture, music, dance, and theatre" (ibid). It is precisely this performance history that Chapman spends the majority of his paper discussing.

Having proposed sound-sculpture as a hybrid, interdisciplinary form, Chapman thereafter surveys a brief fragment of the history of playable sound-sculptures prior to the bow chime and steel cello. Chapman's intention here, as he puts it, is to place both the steel cello and bow chime "within a wider [sphere of] development and [as such] … outline some particular tendencies" (Chapman, 2003: 2). He mentions here, specifically, the works of a number of figures: Luigi Russolo, Harry Partch, and the Baschet Brothers. For the purpose of this overview, a brief summary of each shall suffice.

Chapman begins by mentioning the work of Italian Futurist, Luigi Russolo. Through both his 1913 manifesto, *The Art of Noises* (see 2004), and his battery of original instruments, the *intonarumori*[5], Russolo directly raised questions of what constituted musical sound, and directly demanded the regeneration of music "through challenging the demarcation of what sound/noises were acceptable within the sphere of musical practice" (Chapman, 2003: 3). Essentially, Chapman notes, Russolo aimed to "widen the gene-pool of organised sound by bringing the sounds, or more precisely the

[4]Chapman's paper, *From Object to Instrument*, was originally a conference paper delivered at "WARP/WOOf", Leeds University, 2003.

[5]Russolo's *Intonarumori*, premièred on 2nd June, 1913 in Modena, Italy, were conceived as a "Noise orchestra" comprising six categories: 1. roars/claps/noises of falling water/driving noises/bellows; 2. whistles/snores/ snorts; 3. whispers/mutterings/rustlings/grumbles/ grunts/gurgles; 4. shrill sounds/cracks/ buzzings/ jingles/shuffles; 5. percussive noises using metal/wood/skin/stone/baked earth etc.; 6. animal and human voices/shouts/moans/screams/laughter/rattlings/sobs. For more information on Russolo and his *Intonarumori,* see his manifesto, *The Art of Noises* (2004).

'noise', of the outside world of modernity, into the realms of art and music" (ibid). The *intonarumori* were a direct means of achieving this aim through their invocation of the noise of the modern – and they could well be considered to mark the birth of the movement of artists conceiving and creating sound-sculptures.

Chapman's second figure of interest is Harry Partch, who "notoriously burnt his own [more traditionally styled] compositions in 1930, and set himself on a course towards the creation of a new set of instruments" (Chapman, 2003: 3-4). These new instruments, Chapman notes, announced Partch's break "both from his own musical past and more generally that of western art music - in particular what he regarded as the 'tyranny' of the system of 12-tone, equal temperament" (ibid). Whereas, then, Russolo's *intonarumori* demonstrate a break from the forms and codes of western art music in the name of modernity, Partch's break was "conceived in the terms of a reconnection with older practices and civilisations" (ibid). In such a way, for Chapman, Partch's sound-sculptures demonstrate "a drive couched in a nostalgia for an imagined past which ... [Partch] sees as a repository for values lacking in his own time and culture" (ibid: 4).[6]

Chapman's third and final point of focus is *Les Sculptures Sonores*: the instruments conceived and created by François and Bernard Baschet (the Baschet Brothers). *Les Sculptures Sonores* present again an altogether different scenario from either Russolo or Partch. Created in the late 1940s, the Baschets contended that the sonic experience of their instruments could rival the sonorities produced by the *musique concrète* experimentations of Pierre Schaeffer.[7] However, unlike Partch and Russolo, the Baschets struggled to transcend received musical conventions, often opting for renditions of Bach and Vivaldi in performances (Baschet, 1990: 98). As Chapman observes: "uncertain [of] how they traversed the various disciplines they could be aligned to ... [they] moved into the area of activity which seemed the most straight-forward, i.e. a direct engagement with the public through site specific artworks and educational workshops" (Chapman, 2003: 6). *Les Sculptures Sonores* were, in such a way, conceived equally as "gallery and site-specific exhibits … as concert instruments, as educational aids and as marketable commodity" (ibid: 5).[8]

Chapman closes his paper with some overall observations on these figures' works. Specifically, suggesting that the conception and creation of sound-sculpture illustrates a utopian or visionary impulse; a utopianism that for whatever reason seeks to "break free of categorisation and constraint within discrete disciplines" (Chapman, 2003: 7). He also observes, though, that whilst the position of sound-sculpture in relation to established western musical culture "is complex, being both a disavowal of codes and conventions and a desire for its renewal … [between Russolo, Partch, and the Baschets at least] there is perhaps in common a re-evaluation of, or re-connection with, the fundamental materiality of sound beyond the codes and practices of music" (ibid).

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[6]For more information on Partch, see his book, *Genesis of Music* (1979).

[7]*Musique concrète,* a form of electronic music developed in the late 1940s by Pierre Schaeffer, was characterised by a utilisation of 'acousmatic sound' (that is, sound that one hears without seeing an originating cause), and was facilitated by the emergence of music technology such as microphones and magnetic tape recorders. For more information on *Musique concrète,* Pierre Schaeffer, or any of his associates, see any of Schaeffer's many writings (for example, 1967).

[8] For more information on the Baschet brothers and *Les Sculptures Sonores*, see François Baschet's book, *Les Sculptures Sonores* (1990).

To return to my own questions underpinning this review though, having sketched out Chapman's work, what may seem striking is the absence of discussion on the bow chime and steel cello specifically. Whilst indeed, Chapman at the opening of his work claims the bow chime and steel cello as a case study – and suggests that, as sound-sculptures, they transcend traditional realms of categorisation – the overwhelming majority of his words are spent tracing and establishing a wider art-historical lineage to which the bow chime and steel cello can be aligned. Whilst Chapman's paper, then, may well provide ample contextual grounding and background information for my discussion here, his art-historical motivations largely restrict him from devoting any thought at all to the area of central importance to this project: the sound the bow chime generates. Indeed, he neglects even to provide a description of its sound – and certainly there is no mention of the sublime or any other related idea.

So this brings me on to the second figure of interest in the bow chime's literature: Adrian Palka, whose remarks on the bow chime are to be found in a short paper entitled *From Trash to Totem: An Odyssey of Steel* (2006).[9]

The central concern of this paper lies with the notion of trash – that is, with discarded matter and refuse. Specifically, Palka's concern is with the artistic appropriation, use, or perhaps re-use of trash; an artistic strategy that could well be exemplified by Rutman and Demby, whose sound-sculptures, we might recall, arose "following a chance encounter with a sheet of scrap metal on a piece of New York waste ground" (Palka, 2006: 3). Palka begins his discussion, though, speaking more broadly about the use of trash in the arts. Only later on does he address the bow chime and steel cello specifically.

Palka explains at the work's opening that the artistic use of trash/rubbish has its roots in the avant-garde of the early twentieth century. "The employment of chance events and found and discarded objects", Palka explains, "has its origins in the work of the DaDaists" (Palka, 2006: 4). Particularly of relevance here, Palka notes, are Kurt Schwitters and Marcel Duchamp, who both utilised found materials in their art work – in Schwitters' case, most notably in his *Merzbau* project[10], and in Duchamp's, in his various 'ready-made' works[11]. The drive informing the artistic appropriation of trash in these works, Palka explains, represents a means "to redefine and re-ascribe symbolic value" (Palka, 2006: 7). "Normative socially and economically derived definitions of trash or rubbish or waste", Palka suggests, "emphasize its status as useless and unwanted. However, to the artist-maker trash presents dimensions beyond these. To the artist-maker, a piece of trash is primarily an object within a process of making and meaning-making. Trash presents objects, which while still visible, though not used to fulfil

[9]Palka's paper, *From Trash to Totem,* was originally a conference paper delivered at "Rubbish, Waste, and Litter; Culture and its Refuse/als", Warsaw School of Social Psychology, 2006.

[10]Schwitters' *Merzbau* was conceived as a vast architectural/sculptural project in which Schwitters both drastically altered the interiors of a number of spaces with various three-dimensional shape, and crowded the space with many other materials of objects – or "spoils" and "relics" – contained in countless nooks and grottoes. For more information on Schwitters' *Merzbau*, see Elizabeth Gamard's book, *Kurt Schwitters' Merzbau: The Cathedral of Erotic Misery* (2000).

[11]Duchamp coined the term 'ready-made' to describe various works of 'found art'. A notable example is Duchamp's work, *Fountain* (1917): an inverted urinal that Duchamp signed with the pseudonym "R. Mutt". For more information on Duchamp, see any of the numerous commentaries on his work. For example, Janis Mink's book, *Duchamp* (2000).

prescribed social and economic functions, are still potentially available, useable and wanted by the artist" (ibid). Thus, whilst trash may well represent material at the threshold of disappearance, by way of its appropriation, artists such as Schwitters and Duchamp, according to Palka, "inject [into trash] new uses, desires, meanings and definitions" (ibid).

I have already mentioned that the bow chime and steel cello – as well as Demby's derivatives – arose following the adoption of a similar artistic strategy: that is, "following a chance encounter with a sheet of scrap metal on a piece of New York waste ground" (Palka, 2006: 3). In the early avant-garde works of Schwitters and Duchamp though, the possibilities and suggestions highlighted above – that being, to inject into trash new uses, meanings, and the like – were "issued in the form of direct and programmatic challenges to what artists perceived to be the flawed value systems of tradition and as a means to provok[e] ... wider transformations in consciousness and in society" (ibid: 8). By contrast, in the late 1960s – the time when Rutman and Demby were active – the aesthetic exploitation of the discarded object in such a way was a well established artistic strategy. In fact, it could be said that "from Kurt Schwitters' first reassembled scraps of trash in his ... *Merzbau* in the early twentieth century ... waste materials have maintained an almost unbroken presence in art" (ibid: 6). For Palka though, the continuing relevance of the steel cello and bow chime still lies in the values of transgression and originality expressed in the early avant-garde.

To explain why this is the case, Palka here turns to Hal Foster's text, *The Return of the Real* (1995), or more precisely, to Foster's notion of the 'return'. This is a notion we might understand less in terms of an actual return, and more in terms of a 'narrative of return' or reprise. Reviewing Foster's text, Palka suggests that "the art of the post-war avant-gardes in the US, which could be said to include Demby and Rutman ... does not represent a simple copy or inauthentic repetition of earlier work … [but rather] a reprise or 'return' to the [early] avant-garde in the form of a rigorous reworking of foundational avant-garde practices which act to advance art" (Palka, 2006: 6-7). In this light, Palka observes that whilst Rutman and Demby's methods may have been directly derived from the early avant-garde, their approaches differed. Whilst the programmatic ideological position of the early avant-garde saw artists such as Schwitters and Duchamp present themselves "as masters of their materials, shaping them to fit their manifesto" (ibid: 10), Rutman and Demby's artistic practice was alternatively based on innocent positivism and empirical personal discovery. As Palka suggests: "Apparently unaware of the traditions they followed, their statements testify to slow personal, sometimes collaborative, rediscoveries of pre-existent approaches and forms" (Palka, 2006: 11).

To this end also – and again invoking Foster's notion of the 'return' or reprise – Palka suggests as well that, "through the discovery of the sounds inherent in objects and found materials ... [Rutman and Demby's] work suggests a 'return' to the putative origins of music-making: A 'return' to the very roots of music" (Palka, 2006: 11). This is a point, for Palka, that is illustrated by commentaries on the sound-sculptures that "repeatedly refer to the sense of the 'ancient' and 'inborn' qualities of the sounds of the Steel Cello [and bow chime]" (ibid). Though, as Foster conceived it, this 'return' or reprise constitutes a radical reworking of earlier practices sufficient to *advance* contemporary artistic practice. So, as Palka continues: "Simultaneously ... the use of industrial materials

suggests a highly contemporary frame of reference. Audiences and critics searching for ways to describe what they hear in the sounds of the Steel Cello [and bow chime] refer equally to natural sounds and industrial sounds …These comments describe the process of 'return' as Foster defines it, to a form of artistic practice which is both primal and current" (ibid).

In closing the paper, Palka lastly discusses the trend of artists exploiting trash to "speak of objects and materials possessing soul and in terms of their redemption" (Palka, 2006: 13). This trend evokes for Palka a powerful animistic suggestion, and a deep psychic interpenetration of the artist and his materials. In concluding, Palka observes comparable artistic concerns in the process of making and performing enacted by Rutman and Demby. Through performance, Palka suggests, Rutman and Demby are able to "enter into a public display of attuned empathy with the objects they had produced. Through this process … [they are] able to enact, suggest and invoke a return to a primordial psychic link between man and object" (ibid: 13-14).

Having now sketched out the main points of Palka's paper, it might certainly be noted that in contrast to Chapman's work – which mentioned very little about the bow chime itself – Palka's offers some valuable insights into the artistic workings and strategies underlying the conception of the bow chime. However, the slant of Palka's enquiry still remains art-historical: by means of investigating Rutman's use of trash, Palka traces a lineage to the early avant-garde, and also, attempts to define Rutman's work in terms of particular tendencies current to the time of the bow chime's conception such as the 'return'. Perhaps inevitably then, like Chapman, who ceased to mention anything about the bow chime other than its position in an art-historical lineage, Palka similarly stops short of devoting any real discussion to the sound the bow chime generates – and certainly, he does not speak of the bow chime in the specific terms of the sublime.

Having reviewed Chapman's and Palka's paper then, we could well conclude that an investigation into the bow chime's sublimity represents uncharted terrain when it comes to the academic literature surrounding Rutman's sound-sculpture. Considering, though, that neither Chapman or Palka offer even a mention of the term 'sublime', or 'sublimity', or any related idea, we might first ask the question: how might the subject of the sublime be justified as a relevant area of investigation?

Given the paucity of academic literature on the subject, here we are perhaps forced to turn to a variety of other texts; texts which in their remarks more readily make the tentative connection – even if indirectly – between the bow chime's sound and the notion of the sublime. The citation opening the thesis by Christina Robb (2005) I have already noted to carry some suggestion of sublimity, so perhaps needs no further mention here. Robb's article, though, features alongside a series of other articles, commentaries, pamphlets, flyers and so forth, which together have been collected as documentation to Chapman and Palka's DVD documentary on the performance history of the bow chime and steel cello (see Chapman and Palka, 2005). A number of these other commentaries are perhaps also significant in their evocation of powerful, profound, or overwhelming experiences – qualities that, as I mentioned briefly in the introduction, represent perhaps the basic traits of a 'sublime experience'.

To name a few examples, in a collection of quotations assembled into a document simply entitled *The Boston Globe Cuttings,* (Anon1, 2005), an unknown author describes a performance of the bow chime, declaring: "The crowd is suspended on waves of sound, fascinated. Minds zoom out of their usual cramped quarters in the here and now … the strange sounds somehow makes the difficult connection of present and past to future. The late afternoon breeze blows, and time stops … Unearthly! It summons outer-space images and cosmic musings" (ibid). Another article, entitled *Steel Yourself* by journalist Rory O'Connor (2005), likens Rutman's music to the act of breathing. Another article still, this time entitled *Synopsis of the US Steel Cello Ensemble* (Anon2, 2005), suggests of Rutman's sound-sculptures: "if you release your critical faculty for the least bit, the pulsing [steel] cello can send you spinning down narrow corridors of your mind into places you've never been before" (ibid).

Given these remarks and their various evocations of astounding and profound experiences, there are perhaps some grounds to argue that the sound of Rutman's creations prompted for each figure a 'sublime experience' – or something at least very similar. Assuming this to be the case, we could well justify an in-depth investigation into the bow chime's sound and its relation to the notion of sublimity, with the premise being: a number of people find this sound sublime, so now it seems logical to investigate the mechanisms that give rise to its sublimity.

Summary.

To summarise, having reviewed the academic texts of Chapman and Palka, we might certainly suggest there to be the potential for quite a substantial body of further research to be conducted into the bow chime, the steel cello, and other related areas. At present, in fact, academic enquiry seems to be limited solely to art-historical and contextual investigation.

In this thesis, I shall attempt to break free from this particular trend and instead, open a dialogue of theoretical discussion concerning the aesthetic of the bow chime's sound. My intention, as I mentioned in the introduction, is to investigate how the sound generated by the bow chime relates to the notion of the sublime – a particular piece of terminology untouched in Chapman's and Palka's papers on the bow chime and steel cello. Before I open the main body of discussion though, it is first necessary to provide a brief introduction to the theoretical debate on the sublime itself.

2

The Ghost of Longinus:

an introduction to the sublime.

What is the sublime?

As I mentioned at the opening of the work, the discourse of the sublime arose originally from an aesthetic treatise usually attributed to the ancient Greek critic Dionysius Longinus entitled *Peri Hupos,* or *On Sublimity* (see Longinus, 1965). Longinus originally conceived the sublime as a rhetorical device; as "something that animates poetic discourse from within … [and that leads] the listener or the reader into transports of ecstasy" (Shaw, 2006: 2). The notion of the sublime, though, has since undergone a number of quite radical transformations at the hands of a large number of later figures (for just a few examples, see Burnet, 1965; Ballie, 1953; Addison, 1826; Burke, 2007; Kant, 1951). Obviously, this thesis lacks the scope to include a concise examination of each and every adaptation of the term.[12] Also, as I mentioned before, as each individual shall review in quite some depth the finer mechanics of a particular kind of sublimity and its sublime moment, here I shall simply provide a more general introduction to the subject, detailing some of its general ideas and themes.

Overall then, how might we define the notion of the sublime? In broad terms, it might be said that, "whenever experience slips out of conventional understanding, whenever the power of an object or event is such that words fail and points of comparison disappear, *then* we resort to the feeling of the sublime" (Shaw, 2006: 2). Broadly defined then, the sublime marks "the limits of reason and expression together with a sense of what might lie beyond these limits" (ibid). The sublime refers, that is, to the "moment when the ability to apprehend, to know, and to express a thought or sensation is defeated … yet through this very defeat, the mind gets a feeling for that which lies beyond thought and language" (ibid: 3).

This particular characterisation of the sublime moment as a certain 'defeat' of the mind – a characterisation that is carried, in one way or another, through pretty much every major theoretical study into the term – leads many figures to suggest the sublime

[12]For an introduction to the overall history of the sublime, see Philip Shaw's book, *The Sublime* (2006). Or, for a more specific discussion on the early development of the term, see Marjorie Hope-Nicolson's book, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite* (1959).

feeling itself to involve a sense of displeasure (for examples, see Burke, 2007; Kant 1951). Some figures, in fact, even go as far as to suggest it to involve a feeling or terror and horror – a point to which I shall return later on. Many figures consider the feeling of the sublime, though, to also involve a feeling of pleasure. In fact, most consistently, the sublime moment is considered to involve something of a contradictory feeling of pleasure *and* displeasure, or a negative pleasure (for examples, again see Burke, 2007; Kant, 1951).

In each of the following sections, I will sketch out further the mechanisms of this kind of feeling. It might be noted here though that such a feeling is perhaps the most telling distinction of the sublime from other aesthetic categories such as the beautiful – which are often characterised as involving simply a sense of (disinterested) pleasure (Eco, 2006: 294). In fact, in many studies the sublime is set against the concept of the beautiful – and more often than not, as a point of theoretical contrast (for examples, see Burke, 2007; Kant, 1951). The beautiful, normally, is suggested to be "light, fleeting and charming … [encouraging] a spirit of unity and harmony" (Shaw, 2006: 9). The sublime, by contrast, is normally considered as dark, profound and overwhelming, encouraging feelings of difference and deference. The sublime, thus, is greater than the beautiful – or at least by the power of its affects. The sublime is considered to be that which uplifts the soul and arouses great thoughts and passions; a term that represents the awe-inspiring, the magnificent, the monumental, and the astounding.

However, like the beautiful, and indeed, like any other aesthetic category, the sublime is inherently a subjective feeling; a feeling, that is, whose stimuli can vary from one person to another. Both "the objects that arouse this [sublime] feeling and their interpretations are [thus] socially constructed … and [so can] vary not only from one epoch to another and from one culture to another but also from one discipline to another" (Nye, 1996: 3). As a consequence, perhaps inevitably, the subject of sublimity has been approached from a multitude of theoretical angles; each of which has addressed the topic from a different perspective, and each of which has found different stimuli for its experience.

A more traditional stance, for example, is to associate sublimity with such things as the alpine, storms, deserts, and oceans; with the vast and overwhelming forces of nature, which in particular instances are suggested to reflect the glory of Deity (see, for examples, Burnet, 1965; Ballie, 1953; and Addison, 1826). This alone contrasts strongly with the original, 'rhetorical' sublime conceived by Longinus in the first century A.D. (Hope-Nicolson, 1959: 321). However, more recently, the subject has also received something of a revival in discussions relating to a number of completely different areas: for example, from those seeking to describe the experience of certain works of – particularly avant-garde – art, cinema and the like (see Lyotard, 1991; Žižek, 2000). On a related note also, analysis of the sublime has recently spilled over into various other areas of theoretical discussion. A number of writers in the psychoanalytic tradition, for example, have sought to understand the psychological mechanisms underlying its experience (see Wieskel, 1976; Lacan, 1992). It has also been debated by feminist critics (see Freeman, 1995). It has even been employed in discussing the postmodern condition (see Lyotard, 1992; Jameson, 1991). So how do I intend to approach and employ the term in this work?

Sublimity and the bow chime.

In the following discussion, I will draw upon a number of, perhaps, the more notable ideas concerning the nature of the sublime; each of which will in some way be linked to the experience of the bow chime and its sound. I mentioned in the introduction that this investigation shall comprise three discussions; each of which will focus upon one experiential case study of the bow chime's sound, and each of which will emphasise one philosopher's ideas about the sublime. Perhaps already we might see emerging some of the central themes of this discussion: a stress upon a certain 'defeat' of the mind by overwhelming qualities of sound; ideas of terror, of contradictory pleasure and displeasure, and so on. Before I proceed, however, a few words should first be said about the content of the case studies.

From the outset, I should stress that I do not intend to directly engage with any of the journalist-style commentaries on the bow chime already cited in the work – such as, for example, Christina Robb's statement cited at the opening of the work. These are, I feel, simply too brief and definitely too vague to provide the basis of a full-scale investigation into the sound's sublimity. Certainly, they are not substantial enough to form case studies. Hence why I am opting to instead focus my attention solely upon a selection of my personal experiences. I mentioned this point already at the opening of the work: that I intend to centre the work around three case studies which each describe one of my own experiences with the bow chime and its sound.

It perhaps goes without saying that, in selecting these case studies, I have attempted to draw upon those experiences that seem to me to be most obviously fit for a discussion on sublimity; experiences that I feel could each be demonstrated to concern the sublime and indeed, for me, very much prompted such a feeling in one way or another. To this end, these case studies are intended to serve a heuristic function: they form a broadly accurate guide to the sound and its sublime moments; a guide based upon general knowledge gained by my own experiences and encounters with it. I should perhaps stress at this stage though that the characteristics outlined in these case studies are not necessarily intended to be strictly accurate or reliable for every situation. I am not suggesting, that is, that each and every time this sound gives rise to sublimity, it will be prompted by one of these particular characteristics. Rather, my intention is for these accounts to function as, simply, a 'rule of thumb'; an intuitive judgement or educated guess as to the characteristics of this sound in moments of sublimity. The same might be said also about each of the subsequent claims concerning the supposed nature of this sound's sublimity: they represent broad principles that are not intended to be strictly accurate or reliable in every encounter with the sound, but nevertheless, do provide a good educated guess as to its nature, based upon my own experiences with this sound.

The following section begins the main body of discussion. I will open this section – and each of the subsequent sections – with an overview of the experiential case study in question. I shall thereafter attempt to relate this experience to a particular idea about the nature of the sublime – in the first instance based around the writings of Edmund Burke.

3

Teetering on the Edge of Annihilation:

an ecstasy of terror.

Case Study 1: Drowning in an ocean of sound.

In 2007, I attended a show by Rutman and a number of other bow chime (and steel cello) practitioners entitled *Dislocation,* which was performed in Coventry Cathedral. Constructed in the 1960s following the destruction of the former Cathedral in the Coventry Blitz of World War Two, Coventry Cathedral – a gigantic box-like enclosed space – has a most interesting acoustic. Most days of the week, the general public are encouraged to wander around the space, to explore the alcoves and contemplate religion and life in general. At this time, one can hear the soft reverberant echoes of its visitors ever so quietly inhabiting the space. One can hear everybody at once. We might say perhaps that, acoustically, it is a communal space – it certainly is not dictatorial. If desired, one can exercise selective listening, one can home in upon each instance and eavesdrop into conversations. One can internally localise and discriminate between many sound sources. One can sift through the soundscape, discard noise, and focus attention upon whatever or whomever one desires.

Delivered in this space, the *Dislocation* show was a somewhat formal affair: audience members dressed in appropriately smart attire, were served refreshments of wine and juice upon entry, and were seated on the pews of the Cathedral so as to face the altar where the performers were staged. The show was structured in a similarly formal manner, being segmented into a 'programme' format, comprising a set number of pieces. These included some of Rutman's more notable works: *Song of the Steel Cello* and *Dresden* – both pieces featuring improvisation based on loose musical structures, the latter of which was built around a narrative 'sonic depiction' of the bombing of the city of Dresden.

Whilst such formalities may not come as a surprise given the Cathedral setting, what may seem more unusual is that, prior to the show, the performers had erected a ten-speaker surround-sound system in the space with which to amplify a bow chime, a steel cello, and various other forms of instrumentation. Inevitably, the acoustic quality of the Cathedral during the performance drastically altered.

The bow chime, at its most extreme, emit excessively loud, deep, pulsing tones. The tones were so deep, in fact, that one feared the sound may drop from the bottom of the frequency spectrum, and disappear to one's audible senses, becoming replaced only by the tactile sensation of infra-sonic undertones pulsating, lulling and swaying the body. When this loud and low tone hit my body – and the word 'hit' here seems wholly justified – I felt my internal organs being viscerally shaken, as though a frenzied force were entering every contour of my inner being.

The seismic eruption of sound energy created at this moment engulfed the surrounding environment. I could feel the floors quake beneath my feet, the walls shiver, and my seat shake vigorously. The tones proceeded around and through obstacles, they proceeded to the furthest depths of the space, and were perceived by myself in a rebounded, de-localized form from all angles imaginable. Such an effect saw the erosion of all sense of acoustic spatiality. No longer could I orient my attentions around the soundscape as before; all I could hear at any angle I turned was that deep, pulsating sound surround me.

Further, I began to lose all contact with the acoustic horizon. The Cathedral space within which I was situated – which previously displayed a subtle communal blur of the soft reverberant echoes of its inhabitants – became bombarded by a mass influx of sound. No longer could I choose what or who or what not or who not to listen to, for in the midst of this space, I could hear no other sound than that of the bow chime. Confronted by this sound, in fact, it seemed hard to imagine anything that could equal, not least surpass, its might. Were I to scream at the very top of my voice, no one would answer my call. Doubtless nobody would hear me at all.

My feelings at the point lead me to recall a book by David Toop entitled *Ocean of Sound* (1995), the title of which acts as a metaphor to describe what sound-ecologist R. Murray Schafer originally termed 'the soundscape' (see Schafer, 1994). Metaphorically, I could perhaps equate the feeling described in this account to that which one imagines might be experienced deep under an ocean: the feeling of being utterly submerged.

Yet, if I were to utter the words, 'immersed in an ocean of sound', this feels to me to be wholly unsatisfactory in articulating the experience of this sound. Its loudness was more invasive and threatening than a mere immersion, which to me implies some degree of safety and security. Indeed, this sound was so loud as to be terrifying, horrifying, unsettling, unnerving. It felt like a paralysing shock; an attack whose immensity short-circuited and morbidly threatened every one of my physical dependencies. It felt as though it would drive my body to its limits; as though it were trying to shake the life out of me; to annihilate me from the inside out.

Indeed, the feeling of '*drowning* in an ocean of sound' seems more fitting; the feeling of sheer terror being not simply completely immersed in a substance, but rather, having that substance completely overwhelm and engulf the body. It is the momentary feeling of being swallowed; the moment after the last breath has expired, and all the body can do is submit to the invasion, cease fighting, remove the defence barriers, and allow the invading force full, unconditional entry to the fortress of the body.

Whilst this 'invasion' of sound may well in fact not lead to the body's demise, one still feels possessed, colonized, haunted. One feels overwhelmed, helpless, unable to offer

resistance. Demise lingers in the imagination, as though perpetually poised on the brink of death; as though perched on the threshold to oblivion.

Terror and delight: Burke's sublime.

So what of sublimity? It is my intention in this work, we will recall, to consider the association between this experience and the sublime; to consider for what reason these characteristics might give rise to the feeling of sublimity. A clue here might be found in the numerous suggestions of fear, trepidation, and even terror, that underlie this account. These suggestions are perhaps exemplified by phrases such as, 'demise lingers in the imagination, as though perpetually poised on the brink of death', and 'drowning in an ocean of sound'. I mentioned in the previous section that in some formulations, the sublime is considered to paradoxically stem from the displeasure associated with fear, horror and terror. In this section, I shall attempt to argue that this particular experience may well be bound with one such formulation of sublimity; a formulation conceived by Irish-born philosopher, Edmund Burke (1729-1797).

Before I continue with my discussion on the bow chime specifically, to outline the grounds of the forthcoming discussion, I would like to spend a few pages first sketching out Burke's thoughts on the sublime, which are documented primarily in his 1757 text, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (2007).[13]

As I briefly mentioned, Burke's *Enquiry* (as I shall call it), calls attention to the experience of terror; by which I mean to say, it is to the experience of terror that Burke traces the 'source' of the sublime. Burke declares at the work's opening that, "[w]hatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operatives in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*" (Burke, 2007: Part 1, section VII).

At a cursory glance, such an explanation may seem to characterise the sublime feeling as inherently negative and displeasing; as an experience bound with fear, with horror, and with pain. Burke later asserts however that a mode of pleasure can indeed be derived from such an experience. As he suggests: "if the pain and terror are modified so as not to be actually noxious; if the pain is not carried to violence, and the terror is not conversant about the present destruction of the person, as these emotions clear the parts ... they are capable of producing delight" (Burke, 2007: Part 4, Section VII.).

What Burke is suggesting here then is that one may "delight in sublime terror so long as actual danger is kept at bay" (Shaw, 2006: 54). So, as an example, there is an evident difference between engaging in a fight for survival and contemplating it from afar: whilst "the former involves a real possibility of annihilation, the latter treats it merely as an idea" (ibid). Pain, terror and violence, thus, must either be modified, or mitigated by the effects of distance for Burke's sublime feeling to arise. As Burke declares: "When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving delight, and are simply

[13]Burke also remarks on the sublime in a lesser known text, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1969), which sees Burke extend the terms of his aesthetic analysis to the domain of politics. The event that prompted this renewed enquiry – as the name might suggest – was the French Revolution, which was inaugurated by the fall of the Bastille in Paris on 14 July 1789.

terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful" (Burke, 2007: Part 1, Section VII.).

As we briefly established in the previous section though, the sublime is often considered to involve a contradictory feeling of pleasure *and* pain. Accordingly, Burke does indeed note that the 'delight' that he considers to arise in the sublime moment is "not [in fact] pleasure, but a sort of delightful horror, a sort of tranquility tinged with terror" (Burke, 2007: Part 4, Section VII). In a moment, I shall examine in a little more depth exactly why Burke uses the term "delight" and rejects that of "pleasure". Beforehand, though, it is necessary to define the moment of Burke's sublime a little further.

We have established already that the sublime for Burke is that which presents pain, terror and violence as modified or mitigated by the effects of distance. For Burke, the weak or moderated states of pain or terror that such (sublime) objects arouse are ones which cause a kind of shock and consequential invigoration (Crowther, 1989: 8). Such a thing, Burke associates with the passion of astonishment. As he suggests: "The passion caused by the great and sublime ... is astonishment: and astonishment is that state of the soul in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it" (Burke, 2007: Part 2, Section I.). However, as Burke continues: "Hence arises the great power of the sublime, that, far from being produced by them, it anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible force" (ibid). Refining this process slightly, we might suggest that the sublime moment induces a "temporary dislocation of sensibilities that [later] force the observer into mental action" (Nye, 1996: 6).

The emphasis here both on the initial mental strain on cognition and the mind's subsequent response, gives us a clue as to Burke's distinction of the term 'delight' in opposition to that 'pleasure'. For Burke, "[p]leasure of every kind quickly satisfies; and, when it is over, we relapse into indifference, or, rather, we fall into a soft tranquillity which is tinged with the agreeable color of the former sensation" (Burke, 2007: Part 1, Section III.). Conversely, the word 'delight' for Burke, "express[es] the sensation which accompanies the removal of pain or danger" (ibid: Section IV.), and which consequently leaves the mind "in a state of much sobriety, impressed with a sense of awe, in a sort of tranquillity shadowed with horror" (ibid: Section III.).

To this end, in the sublime moment, when confronted by the 'terrible' object, the mental action which hurries us on by an irresistible force could be redefined, in fact, as the means by which we contract or perhaps even cease the 'painful' mental strain placed on the mind beforehand. And, it is precisely for such a reason that this process is accompanied by the feeling of delight. For Burke, this whole process functions as, essentially, a kind of self-confirming labour for the mind. By this I mean to say, the consequential act of exertion elicited by sublime objects leaves the individual's mind feeling "energised, more alive and thus more 'itself'" (Shaw, 2006: 54). Burke's sublime is ultimately then "a feeling deeply bound up with out instinct for *self-preservation*" (Crowther, 1989: 8), and we might say that, in short, the delight in this experience arises from the "psychological relief at having managed and survived a … [potentially]

threatening experience" (Shaw, 2006: 79).

Overall, from this brief review we should perhaps note that if an object – or perhaps more pertinently, a sound – were to evoke sublimity in Burke's sense, it would announce to the spectator or listener, in some way, the possibility of pain and above all of death. In other words, it would "announce that the gaze, the other, language or life will soon be extinguished ... that it is possible that soon nothing more will take place" (Lyotard, 1991: 84). Critically however, for delight to be produced, by way of distance or modification, something must be held back; annihilation must be suspended; we must become aware of our preservation from extinction. If this were not the case, then this experience would be incapable of giving delight, and would simply be terrible. In this circumstance – and only in this circumstance – "the soul … affect[s] the body as though it were experiencing some externally induced pain, by the sole means of representations that are unconsciously associated with painful situations" (Lyotard, 1991: 99).

Noise, anarchy, and chaos.

Having reviewed Burke's ideas on the sublime, it might be said that the case study of the bow chime's sound documented at the opening of this section smacks of the thematic undertones of (Burkean) sublimity in its frequent references to pain, death and destruction. Of central concern here are suggestions such as those stating that its experience is akin to, for example, 'being poised on the brink of death', and 'drowning in an ocean of sound'. Such statements raise concerns we might identify as directly embodied in Burke's sublime, such as terror, fear, horror and so forth. They seem to suggest that the experience of this sound is in some way bound with a fear of annihilation; a fear that this sound is in some way threatening, or at the least, frightening.

As we have established, though, whilst fear and terror may well be the necessary precursor to the Burkean sublime, finding a sound to be terrible or horrible does not automatically signal sublimity per se. Assuming this to be the case is to neglect the finer points of Burkean sublimity: that being, the focus on delight via distance or modification. Nevertheless, before we can even think about trying to establish a connection between this sound and the (Burkean) sublime, it is worth first spending a few words examining one possible connection between this sound and terror.

To achieve this task, I would like to turn away from Burke – whose remarks on sound and the 'acoustic sublime' are somewhat abrupt and vague – and toward a more recent study by French economist and political adviser Jacques Attali in his book, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (1985). Whilst *Noise* (as I shall call it) does not concern the sublime as such, it does at least position and examine quite explicitly the relationship between sound and terror – a relationship that Burke stops short of investigating in any real detail in the *Enquiry*.

The central concern of *Noise* lies, naturally enough, with 'noise'; a word that in Attali's definition of it, is used to describe a "resonance that interferes with the audition of a message in the process of emission" (Attali, 1985: 26). Attali's noise represents, basically, sounds that interrupt, sounds that interfere, obstruct or block. A number of other studies – most notably by Canadian sound-ecologist Murray Schafer (1974) – write

of such sounds in relation to nuisance, and so betoken demands for noise-abatement legislation. Attali, however, endows his whole commentary on noise with a profoundly more unsettling twist.

For Attali, "*Noise is violence*, it disturbs. To make noise is to interrupt a transmission, to disconnect, to kill. It is a simulacrum of murder" (Attali, 1985: 26). In such a way, noise for Attali announces "the chaotic fraying of [social order, and of] its governing codes. Noise attacks the status quo, the norms that govern relations and dictate one's position as an individual. In essence, it embodies that which disturbs the strata of social relations" (LaBelle, 2000: 167). In fact, in the extreme, "[n]oise is a [literal] source of pain. Beyond a certain limit, it becomes an immaterial weapon of death … Diminished intellectual capacity, accelerated respiration and heartbeat, hypertension, slowed digestion, neurosis, altered diction: these are the consequences of excessive sound in the environment" (Attali, 1985: 26).

Noise, thus, is the acoustic equivalent of chaos and anarchy. It is pregnant with a threat to the governing codes of (social) order. It is an excessiveness that "stands against the resolve by which order protects itself[,] it butts up against the other side of language, an antithetical antagonism agitating the semiotic calm, disrupting the circuitry" (LaBelle, 2000: 173). Noise, also, announces a pernicious agenda; it is "a power founding its legitimacy on the fear it inspires" (Attali, 1985: 26). And in such a way, for Attali, noise should be considered "a threat of death" (ibid), and its experience "a little bit like being killed" (ibid: 28).

The bow chime, as outlined in the case study above, might seem to bear the properties of a potent form of noise in that it interrupts, or interferes with, all other acoustic events or emissions, and thereby forces the listener to absorb and attempt to critically assess a barrage of sound from which there is no escape. Attali may well offer, then, one quite fitting proposal as to why the sound of the bow chime could be productive of terror: it interrupts the perceptions of the listener like a moment of chaos; a lapse in the coherence of social order.

But what, then, of sublimity? If we were to take the view that the bow chime is productive of noise in the strictest sense, then this experience surely would be incapable of procuring the delight of the Burkean sublime; a delight that announces, in the threatening void of fear and pain, that everything is not over. Surely, after all, noise in Attali's terms threatens a kind of descent into social anarchy that acts counter to Burkean sublimity and its stress on safety and security. Noise represents, in other words, the precise antithesis of Burkean sublimity as it is considered the *direct* harbinger of chaos and violence. So in just what sense then might this particular experience be considered sublime?

Sacrifice and sublimity.

Before hazarding an answer to this question, it might be useful to first explore a further set of remarks that Attali makes in *Noise* – the emphasis of which, this time, is upon music. In fact, Attali's primary task in his book *Noise* – aside from, of course, delineating a profile of noise itself – is to trace the genealogy of music and situate its role

socially and culturally by mapping its functions via a series of tropes: Sacrificing, Representing, Repeating, and Composing. For Attali, "all of these networks are co-present … [and so,] music has not passed simply from one stage to another … [but rather] all phases coexist in our complex interactions with music" (Cranny-Francis, 2005: 69). Of particular interest to this discussion is the first trope: the sacrifice.

The Sacrificial phase of Attali's schema concerns a primordial and/or primitive form of music and music-making. It concerns a phase we might understand as prevalent before music was commodified for its exchange-value – its political function then being to enact the process of exchange via representation. It concerns a phase that we might understand as prevalent, also, long before the advent of recording technology – and mass production via repetition. The function of such a music Attali sees quite simply as a means to *confirm* "the possibility of society [and order], whilst encoding (in the noise it channels) the possibility of its subversion or collapse" (Cranny-Francis, 2005: 69).

Broadly speaking, such a music thus presents "[n]oise given form according to a code (in other words, according to rules of arrangement and laws of succession, in a limited space, a space of sounds) that is theoretically knowable by the listener" (Attali, 1985: 25). Thus, if noise is a weapon, and its experience is 'a little bit like being killed', then (sacrificial) music "*is the formation, domestication, and ritualization of that weapon*" (Attali, 1985: 24). It "constitutes communication with this … threatening noise … [and thus] has the explicit function of *reassuring"* (ibid: 27); it has the function of controlling panic, transforming panic into joy, and dissonance into harmony.

So in what sense, then, might this idea relate to the experience of the bow chime? In the earlier literature review, we might recall that I cited David Chapman in concluding that the position of sound-sculpture in relation to established western musical culture, represents "a disavowal of [its] codes and conventions [and] ... a desire [to reconnect with] ... the fundamental materiality of sound beyond the codes and practices of music" (Chapman, 2003: 7). In the specific case of *Dislocation*, I would suggest that the relation between the bow chime and the codes and practices of the western music tradition is perhaps not quite as broken as Chapman makes out. Though I will admit its relation is a little slackened, and certainly not as strong as in many other cases (such as classical recitals and the like), on the part of the performers/organisers, it is still not hard to identify some level of adherence to well-established (social and musical) codes and conventions.

Rutman's engagement with the sound of the bow chime itself is a case in point. Whilst admittedly not grounded in the more rigorous conventions of the western music tradition – such as equal temperament and rules of harmony – Rutman's pieces did possess loosely improvised structures equatable to musical form. One piece that featured as part of the *Dislocation* show entitled Dresden, for example, offered a step-by-step 'sonic depiction' of the bombing of the city of the Dresden – a primitive musical form in contrast to the greats of the western music tradition perhaps, but a musical form nonetheless. We perhaps cannot forget, also, that the *Dislocation* event itself followed quite a strict set of formal customs. The performers and listeners, for example, were separated into counterpoised groups; and the entire *Dislocation* show was structured in a

programme format comprising a set number of pieces. In each of these examples can be found a wealth of formalities and etiquettes, each well established and widely employed in the western music tradition.

Given, then, the earlier suggestion that this sound was comparable to noise, and given these recent comments that the performance of this noise was couched in various codes and conventions, we may well cast this sound as a form of 'sacrificial music': as "[n]oise given form according to a code (in other words, according to rules of arrangement …) that is theoretically knowable by the listener" (Attali, 1985: 25). Of course, the particular codes and conventions I have presented as examples here are in no way exhaustive, and we may well continue to highlight other examples to strengthen this link. However, perhaps the important point to note in respect of the intentions of this project and the Burkean sublime, is Attali's idea that through the presence of order, the terror and pernicious threat of noise is rendered innocuous: order tempers noise's violence, and neuters its disorder, and thus serves the explicit function of reassuring that danger is held back.

However, before we resume discussing the sublime specifically, we might also stress that despite functioning to reassure, in Attali's terms such a music is seen to brush against uncontrollability, to flirt with the beyond – hence the term 'sacrifice'. In fact, for Attali, whilst music may respond to the terror of noise through ritualization, it "rebounds in the field of sound like an echo of the sacrificial channelization of violence" (Attali, 1985: 28). In such a way, then, music's function is analogous to a sacrifice: if "listening to noise is a little bit like being killed … [then] listening to music is to attend a ritual murder, with all the danger, guilt, but also the reassurance that goes along with that" (ibid).

The suggestion here then is that the *Dislocation* show presented a ritualistic enactment of disorder, a domestication of violence, a channelization of anarchy. It suggests that it presented "the fragile order of the ritual … an unstable order on the edge of danger, harmony on the edge of violence" (Attali, 1985: 123). It characterises the bow chime's sound, furthermore, as music that flirts with the beyond; as music divorced from the terror of noise by the merest nuance; as music that presents noise given form, that presents terror with reassurance and security. From this point, I would suggest it to be only a small jump back to the (Burkean) sublime, and an understanding of why this experience evoked sublimity.

The Burkean sublime, we will recall, announces to the spectator or listener the possibility of pain – in this case, via the terror of noise. Yet, the actual source of pain is held back or modified – in this case, via the forms and codes of music. As such, any displease or terror gives way to a feeling of delight, thus meaning that the experience of *Dislocation*, with its loud, overwhelming sound, prompted a kind of tranquility shadowed with horror; a sense of being teetering on the edge of nothingness, of being teetering on the edge of annihilation.

Summary.

To summarise, in this section I have suggested that sublimity could be aroused by the extreme intensity of amplitude observable in a show featuring Rutman entitled

Dislocation. In this experience, the tone was noted as immensely loud, to the extent that it created a colossal acoustic profile that ostensibly destroyed all other modalities of acoustic reference and expression. I described this experience as being akin to 'drowning in an ocean of sound', and described it as 'so loud as to be terrifying, horrifying, unsettling, unnerving'.

The stress of this experience on terror and horror presents striking relevance to the Burkean formulation of the sublime; a formulation in which a subject is struck with terror and astonishment, but finds delight in the fact that any actual danger is modified or mitigated by the effects of distance. In the case of the bow chime, as represented by the *Dislocation* show, I suggested terror to be linked to the notion of noise; noise being an excessiveness that stands against the resolve of order. However – fulfilling the demand of Burkean sublimity for security – I also suggested that, being couched in various codes and conventions of the western music tradition, the would-be terror, even anarchy of noise is rendered innocuous. Such an order, I suggested, reassures that danger is held back or modified.

In the following section, I shall turn to a further case study of the bow chime and its sound which also focuses upon a performance of Rutman's. Again, I shall attempt to relate this experience to a particular idea as to the nature of the sublime – though in this second case, I shall turn away from Burke, and towards a slightly later formulation of the term.

4

Featureless Horizontality:

the sonic wasteland.

Case Study 2: Deserted space/deserted time.

At some point during the summer of 2008, I witnessed Rutman perform on his bow chime in a Berlin nightclub, as part of what the establishment called a 'Noise Festival'.[14] The venue of the event seemed to have been converted from an abandoned power station or something similar – the origins of which were apparent in the crumbling walls, brutal steel construction pillars and copious additions of graffiti. An installation called *The Noizemachine* had been constructed in the particular space in which Rutman was to perform. This installation consisted of what seemed to be a random agglomeration of rubbish and junk: a surgeon's bed with a spinning, noise-emitting megaphone attached to its head, a propellor, various sized speakers, radars, tiny circuit boards, and all manner of other such things. Each of these objects – even if only in the most minute way – contributed to a ferocious cacophony; a cacophony echoed in the surrounding rooms, the spill of whose sounds penetrated my perceptions. I could hear amplified shouting from one room; the pounding clang of metal being beaten from another; harsh, deafening clamours from another still.

Unfazed by the general commotion though, Rutman performed in the centre of this space, amongst all of the noise and the noise-emitting objects. His performance bore many of the qualities already discussed in the previous case study. Some kind of surround-sound amplification rig had been constructed in the space, allowing the bow chime to fill the room with penetrating, intensely loud sound. The sound was so loud, in fact, that even the existing noise of the venue – the acoustic spill from other rooms, people talking and shouting and the like – became hard to discern. However, particularly notable in this performance was the bow chime's tendency to produce what might be called a "flat line" of sound.

The bow chime presented extended, extremely long tones, possessing a pitch that remained unchanged and unchanging. It presented a straight line of sound; a flat swathe of noise, possessing little personality or progression. After the tone began, it remained continuous and static through and throughout time. Intensity remained constant, pitch remained constant, even timbre remained constant.

It was, perhaps, a little similar to the humming of machinery: ever-present and

[14]Referring to *Schlagstrom* festival, held at *Club Maria,* Berlin.

always operational, but at the same time, flat, lifeless, affectless. It was, the non-corporeal, affect-flattened voice of the artificial; a voice aloof to expression and articulation, its only interest and desire being continual production.

I perhaps cannot say how long the tones actually sounded. I can only note how long it *seemed* to sound, in my perceptual encounter with it. And indeed, after a time listening to this flat swathe of sound, I eventually lost all grasp of the actualities of its length. After a time, past and present seemed to blur and my memory of the sound's birth frayed and dissolved. Its temporal boundaries swelled into a realm beyond all critical discernment. It seemed simply too long to grasp; too long to fathom as a discrete duration. It seemed boundless, immeasurable, endless. It seemed never to end – or the reverse, it seemed never to have begun.

As an image, the duration of this sound could be characterised through featureless (meaningless) horizontality or extension, represented perhaps by the desertscape, or even the wasteland. Deserted space. Deserted time. Abandoned, or perhaps never discovered, such an image in my mind is empty and boundless, bereft of life, or even of the residue or remnants of life. Nothing exists in such a space apart from the flat plane extending indefinitely into the horizon. Perhaps it even extends forever, into the infinite – certainly there are no signs suggesting otherwise. Progression in this space is futile and worthless; an exhausting, hopeless, perhaps even absurd exercise.

The 'sonic wasteland' of this sound, as I shall call it, is likewise simply an expanse. It presents to me an absence: an absence of presence, at least of anything other than itself. It is unwavering, uncompromising, indefinite, unspecified, unlimited, unrestricted. Its scale is impossible to calculate or measure, or even predict. It is simply an excess; an overstraining and over-demanding expanse.

Being lost: Kant's sublime.

So, for a second time, we are again confronted by the question of sublimity, and the notion's relevance to this experience. For what reason, might we ask, could the characteristics detailed in this case study give rise to the feeling of sublimity? Why is this particular experience sublime? What, indeed, are the mechanisms underlying this experience's sublimity?

As there are no direct references in this case study to danger or terror, or any of the other traits which characterised the previous discussion, we might discount sublimity of a kind as outlined by Burke. This experience clearly represents sublimity of a different kind; of a kind not so much concerned with one's instinct for self-preservation, and more, we might postulate, with one's capacity for critical discernment; with one's ability to discern, or not discern as the case may be, the temporal boundaries of the bow chime's sound. To this end, I shall attempt to argue in this section that this particular case study, in contrast to the previous section, may be bound with a slightly later formulation of sublimity; a formulation conceived by eighteenth-century German philosopher, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). As in the previous section, I would again like to spend a few initial words outlining the grounds of Kant's sublime before I commence commentary on the bow chime specifically.

Kant's thoughts about the sublime are documented primarily in his 1790 text, the 'Analytic of the Sublime', which forms the centrepiece of his work, *The Critique of Judgement* (1951) – itself the concluding part of his trilogy of works comprising the 1781 text, *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1992), and the 1788 text, *The Critique of Practical Reason* (1997).[15] Though my study will only concern itself with the former, in the 'Analytic' (as I shall call it), Kant in fact defines two types of sublime: the 'mathematical' and the 'dynamic'.

Whilst his dynamic sublime echoes some of the themes of Burke's – such as terror, horror, and so forth – Kant's mathematical sublime alternatively urges us to consider questions of form and its cognitive comprehension. The mathematical sublime, indeed, for Kant is "to be found in an object ... devoid of form, so far as it immediately involves, or else by its presence provokes, a representation of *limitlessness*" (Kant, 1951: 104). What Kant has in mind by the term 'limitlessness' can be illustrated as follows: "If we view a mountain in the distance it has a characteristic shape which enables us to describe it as 'a mountain'. But suppose that we are standing at its base with ... its highest reaches shrouded in mist. Under these conditions we lack the vantage-point which would dispose us to simply describe it as 'a mountain'. Rather, our conceptual faculties cannot take in the sheer immensity of the peak ... The mountain seems, in our close and immediate perceptual encounter with it, to be a limitless phenomenal mass or aggregate, without any overall defining shape or form" (Crowther, 1989: 79).

The mathematical sublime thus might be said to refer "to things which appear either formless ... or which have form but, for reasons of size, exceed our ability to perceive such form" (Shaw, 2006: 78). Kant calls such things the 'absolutely great' (Kant, 1951: 104), meaning that which is beyond magnitude; that which is beyond a merely relative dimension of size, scale or intensity. Such objects, in other words, "are considered formless because we cannot unify its elements in sense intuition" (Shaw, 2006: 78). By which I mean to say, when faced "with a seemingly endless sequence of sensible intuitions, the imagination is overcome by the impossibility of ever accounting for the sequence in its entirety" (ibid: 81).

Kant's distinction here of the term 'imagination' is critical. In Kant's lexicon, the word 'imagination' denotes the faculty of mind that schematises and grasps the sensory world in images and 'forms'. In other words, the imagination *synthesises* or represents the products of sensible intuition (that being, one's raw, unmediated perception of, for example, warmth or hardness), before those products are *thought* through the understanding (Shaw, 2006: 74). In any normal circumstance then, the harmony of imagination and understanding draws the raw immediacy of nature (that being, the evidence of the senses) under the domain of concepts. The case of the sublime, however, presents a different scenario altogether: through aesthetic estimation, the observer's imagination is unable to 'take in' the magnitude that confronts him/her – and despite devices such as computers being able to present some kind of estimate of this magnitude in numerical form, from an aesthetic point of view, the observer is unable to form a sense

[15]Kant also discusses the subject of the sublime in an earlier and lesser known text entitled *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (1960).

of it as a real magnitude. Rather, at such a moment, “the logical estimation of magnitude advances *ad infinitum* with nothing to stop it” (Kant, 1951: 102). The feeling encountered in such a moment, as commentator Thomas Weiskel astutely observes, is “one of *on and on*, of being lost” (Weiskel, 1974: 26).

At this point, we might see emerging the beginnings of a correspondence with the case study documented at the opening of this section – the concern of which, was the long duration (and thus form) of the bow chime's notes. The length of tone, it was suggested earlier, 'swelled into a realm beyond all critical discernment', it was 'simply too long to fathom as a discrete entity'. Here, we find reflected Kant's notion of greatness or vastness of magnitude; we find reflected Kant's idea that the imagination will be unable to 'take in' a sheer, seemingly endless sequence of sensible intuitions. Also, we find reflected – in a quite literal sense – Weiskel's assertion of such a moment as the feeling of on and on. The tone, we might say, seems to have extended to the point at which it is too long for us to grasp. The scale it presents is too large to be credited. The criterion and the power to think it surpass all human standards of sense. Given this observable accordance, it may be reasonably argued that this particular experience bore all the criteria of Kant's mathematical sublimity. Still, the full disposition of this particular formulation remains to be uncovered.

Averting disaster.

We have gathered that confronted by the bow chime's excessive length, the mind's demand for the comprehension and presentation of the sound's *totality* (that is, the mind's demand for closure) leads to a certain failure of the imagination; a failure to present the seemingly formless magnitude of sound into a full and unified image. We might say, perhaps, that the sound's sheer scale appears to frustrate judgement; that it threatens to overwhelm the mind's powers of comprehension, perhaps even calling the autonomy of judgement itself into question (Shaw, 2006: 78). This is a point highlighted by Kant, who notes how in such a moment, such objects seem “in point of form to contravene the ends of our power of judgement, to be ill adapted to ... [and] as it were, an outrage on the imagination” (Kant, 1951: 91). Perhaps it might be said that one's imagination, “has so much difficulty in grasping … [such a sound's] manifold that the … [sound] seems to defeat the very end of cognition itself” (Crowther, 1989: 82).

If is this is an initially displeasing, humbling experience however, in Kant's schema, any displeasure is later to be offset by the intervention of another faculty of the mind: for “[w]hen the imagination … is brought into a dissonant, or conflictual, relation with the spontaneous faculty of understanding, an appeal is made to reason” (Gurlac, 1990: 10).

In Kant's lexicon, the term 'reason' denotes the faculty of mind that leads us to conceive of 'ideas' which our intellect cannot demonstrate or present. Ideas such as that of God, the world, freedom, justice, infinity: each of these is a case in point. Kant describes such ideas as 'supersensible' (Kant, 1951: 102) – a term literally meaning above or beyond the sensible – in that they transcend the realms of the world as given to us by the evidence of the senses. By this I mean to say, such ideas transcend all of the

contingent conditions and determinations of nature, and so enable us to “pursue thought without restriction” (Shaw, 2006: 75).

The mind's capacity to call upon such ideas is significant in the case of the sublime as it enables us, in a way, to sustain the seemingly 'impossible' object of sublimity. Indeed, whilst in the sublime moment, “the logical estimation of magnitude [may well] advance ... *ad infinitum* with nothing to stop it” (Kant, 1951: 102), through our reason, at such a moment we can conceive of even the infinite – itself an 'idea' which can never be presented or experienced, and so is drawn from within the realm of our supersensuous being.

Called upon following the imagination's humiliation and failure, reason's intervention functions, thus, to reconcile the 'disastrous' moment beforehand – and it does so through the acquisition of a 'super-added idea' of the impossible object's totality (Crowther, 1989: 80; Shaw, 2006: 80; Lyotard, 1991: 98). This amounts to what Kant considers to be a 'negative' presentation. In other words, it dislocates the faculties among themselves, and in fact prompts something of “a conflict between … the faculties of the subject, [that is,] between the faculty to conceive of something and the faculty to 'present' something” (Lyotard, 1992: 6).

Whilst in the current case study of the bow chime, the prolonged tone observably provoked an initial failure and frustration of the imagination, in considering these recent comments, we may well also find in this experience a similar reconciliatory action. Indeed, in this case study, the prolonged sound of the bow chime was frequently articulated with such ideas as the 'boundless', the 'immeasurable', and the 'endless'. Numerous other suggestions also depicted its length more specifically in terms of the infinite, or some related concept. As an example: 'it seemed ... suprabiological, as though it receives transplants and lives forever'.

The point here, of course, is not that this sound literally extends forever – clearly we are considering a tone of finite duration. Rather, this particular experience represents a moment when the mind becomes lost, when it looses a grasp upon its perceptions. It represents a moment, in other words, when the tone *seemed* unbounded and formless, when it *seemed* to extend forever. Calling upon such ideas as that of infinity, of the boundless, of the immeasurable, or the endless, attests to a compensatory movement of the mind; a moment when reason steps in to control the perceived excess of experience. It attests to a moment when reason induces the mind to postulate ideas involving higher finality; ideas that can reconcile the disaster suffered by the imagination; ideas that can reclaim for the mind the 'impossible' object.

The bow chime's prolonged length then, in this example, is conceived in terms of rational ideas, despite any presentation of an object – which would be intended to 'display' that duration – lacking to the imagination. This experience, then, represents not so much a disruptive moment that brought critical thought to the point of crisis, but more a 'blip' in one's comprehension of experience; a stutter in the flow of coherence, if you will. For Kant, such a disjunctive movement serves a number of functions, however perhaps most notably, it prompts us to grasp “a *feeling* … for a capacity within our minds that is essentially transcendent to (that is, free from) all determinations of nature” (Shaw,

2006: 83). The sublime, in other words, draws us away from our sensuous experience towards a recognition of the 'higher' transcendental powers of reason that we have within us; powers that transcend the limits of the world as given to us by our senses.

It is precisely from such a recognition that the pleasure in the sublime moment arises. As Kant declares: "The feeling of the sublime is ... at once a feeling of displeasure, arising from the inadequacy of the imagination in the aesthetic estimation of magnitude … and a simultaneously awakened pleasure, arising from the very judgement of the inadequacy of the … faculty of sense being in accord with ideas of reason" (Kant, 1951: 106). In simpler terms, the imagination's inadequacy to cope with the formless phenomenon involves a sense of pain and frustration. Yet, this is succeeded by "a powerful sense of relief (even elation) in so far as the formless object *can* be grasped as a totality in terms of a rational idea" (Crowther, 1989: 81).

Summary.

So, to summarise, in this section I have suggested that sublimity could be aroused by a prolonged duration of tone, in this case observable in a certain performance of Rutman's on the bow chime. In this experience, the tone was noted as 'extended, extremely long, with a pitch that was unchanged and unchanging'. It was noted as 'a straight line of sound, a flat swath of noise, possessing little personality or progression'. In fact, the tone seemed so long as to provoke a feeling of on and on, a feeling of being lost and loosing a grasp on the actualities of its length.

This aspect of being lost – the inability to cohere or discern duration and temporal boundaries – I have suggested presents striking relevance to the Kantian formulation of the sublime; a formulation in which the imagination fails to synthesise all of the immediate perceptions of a seemingly formless duration into a full and unified imagine, and so is forced to turn to the unbounded grasp of reason to reclaim the 'impossible' object. This action thus gives rise to "a kind of cleavage within the subject between what can be conceived and what can be imagined or presented" (Lyotard, 1991: 98); a dislocation which ultimately serves to exhibit one's inner powers of reason, powers which can outreach in thought external objects that overwhelm our senses (Goldthwait, cited in Nye, 1996: 7).

In the following section, I shall turn to a further case study of the bow chime and its sound – though this time not a performance of Rutman's as has been the case in the previous two sections. Again, I shall attempt to relate this experience to a particular idea as to the nature of the sublime – although in this case, to do such a thing, I shall turn away from both Burke and Kant, and towards a more contemporary adaptation of the term.

5

Halfway Between a Whale and a Squadron Bomber:

embracing the unpresentable.

Case Study 3: Shards of Broken Syntax.

I recall my first encounter with the bow chime vividly. It was autumn, 2004, and I had been invited by my then undergraduate tutor, Adrian Palka, to attend a guest lecture conducted by himself and David Chapman. Unknown to me what the lecture was exactly about (I knew that it concerned 'sound-sculpture' in some sort of a way), I was quite taken aback upon entering the lecture theatre. Positioned at the front of the space was a bizarre object: a large metal sheet mounted on a metal frame, with several metal rods protruding from its heart. Not long after, this strange object was introduced as the bow chime: a 'playable sound-sculpture' invented in the 1960s by a man named Bob Rutman. Chapman and Palka's talk provided further art-historical grounding and background information on the bow chime, and I recall them speaking about Luigi Russolo, Harry Partch, the Baschet Brothers and other such figures. Soon after, however, a demonstration of the sound-sculpture itself followed.

Another figure entered the space – who I have since found out was Mark Bowler, a recent graduate at the time who had been working with Palka on a number of performances using the bow chime and steel cello. Bowler approached the bow chime and drew a cello bow precariously across its rods a number of times. To my amazement, this simple action generated the most exquisite sound. It filled the room with a slowly decaying sound-wave; one which seemed at once beautifully delicate, subtle, yet at the same time, powerful, loud and dominating. Bowler then proceeded to bow more repeatedly, creating a long, extended, drone-like sound.

Cocooned within the simplicity of this lonesome, solitary tone moved an intense complexity of timbral coloration; a deluge of interweaving and intertwining colouration; an orgy of undulations, ripples and movement. It was, perhaps, a little similar to a running stream: the continual flow of water that, on the one hand, has a specific direction, is subject to certain physical laws and restraints, yet on the other, has an internal dialogue in a continual struggle with itself – fighting, rowing, invading, persuading. Whilst the stream's direction may seem wholly understandable, its inner workings – the ripples,

bubbles and undulations – appear incomprehensibly complex; constantly fluctuating; fluid yet directed; chaotic yet contained. Yet, this particular aspect is not what interested me the most about this timbre.

On hearing this sound, I recall my mind and memory frantically scrambling for determinacy; to ascertain the sound's identity; to categorise it, order it and classify it. However, strangely, and much to my surprise, I seemed incapable of achieving such a task. Indeed, in the encounter with this timbre, knowledge seemed inapplicable, incompetent and incomplete, impotent. Knowledge seemed no longer present. The timbre of this tone simply seemed incommensurable.

At this moment, and considering this timbre, I found stimulated a spree of disparate and disjunct representations; open-ended signifieds; disjointed ideas; fragmented memories. All it seemed to yield was disjoined images, shards of broken syntax: I heard the disembodied echoes of a thousand squadron bombers overhead. I heard the shadows of machinery, whirring, exchanging, moving and humming. I heard the deep, penetrating rumbles of an earthquake. I heard the roaring motion and fluidity of water, carefully, yet chaotically descend down a rocky ravine. I heard the pain and frailty of degradation. I heard the soaring cosmic musings of an aurora in the ionosphere. I heard the glistening beauty of a calm ocean on a warm summer's eve, shimmering in the fading sunset.

On the one hand, it seemed so natural, and so organic, that one imagines it had seeped up from the very centre of the Earth, and had leaked out through the fault lines and imperfections on the surface. On the other, however, it seemed to bear the distinct hallmarks of industrial and/or post-industrial noise, and would not sound out of place accompanied by a cacophony of excruciating scrapes and bangs and rumbles and whirs. It seemed to present – paradoxical as it may seem – a strange amalgam; an unsettling and absurd, ridiculous juxtaposition of monumental natural forces combined with industrial qualities. It seemed poised between man and nature; halfway between a whale and a squadron bomber.

But how could this be? Compulsively, of course, I felt forced to contemplate it, analyse it, inspect it: Is it possible? Is it real? Is it even happening? And indeed, it did seem to present a rich abundance of significance in which, intuitively perhaps, I grappled for some kind of definition, clarity, and meaning. But nothing I could conceive seemed to give any sense to the sound – nothing yielded. Indeed, many sounds bear similar qualities, aspects or profiles, but they are not quite *this* sound. This was something other; a fissure in my familiarity with the world; an unknowable void upon which I could only dizzily hover. It presented to me a negation, a falling away from what I could grasp, seize, know, perceive. For this was something unknown to me, something that evaded phrases. Unexplainable, Impassable – as an image, it could only be the abyss.

After the Sublime: Lyotard's sublime.

So again, and for the final time, we are confronted by the question of sublimity, and the term's relevance to this particular experience. Can we associate the experience detailed in this account with the sublime? And if so, what are the mechanisms underlying

its experience?

First off, as there are again no direct references to terror, danger, or horror listed in this case, we may discount sublimity of a kind outlined by Burke. This experience represents less a violation or affront as exhibited in the Burkean formulation, and something more like an encounter with what we might call 'the strange'. By that I mean to say that it presents to us the unfamiliar; it presents to us something unusual or surprising in a way that is unsettling or hard to understand. Indeed, in this case, the sound might be characterised as a sort of perplexing peculiarity; an 'oddness' that stimulates an unnerving curiosity. By this token, we may well rule out Kantian sublimity also: there are no direct suggestions pointing toward a boundlessness of form. Quite the reverse in fact, for the particular form of this sound (that form being, the tone's duration) is considered quite intelligible and indeed, presentable to the imagination, being described as 'a slowly decaying sound-wave'.

In the theme of the Kantian sublime, however, there perhaps lies a clue as to sublimity in this case. Indeed, in this particular encounter with 'the strange', if that is what this is, we may well find echoed Kant's characterisation of sublimity as a disruptive moment in which the mind fails to cohere and discern properly one's experience; a moment, that is, when the excesses of experience exceed the grasp of the mind. Also a frustrating and failing moment attesting to a critical inability, the notion of the strange, defined above, very much converges with the spirit of Kantian sublimity. Yet, at the same time, it is something completely separate. It is something more. Not so much simply a 'blip' in one's comprehension of forms, this encounter is something more radical: a moment when our ability to understand the very materiality of sound itself is brought into question; and a moment when any reconciliatory action attempting to reclaim and to 'know' this sound seems utterly futile.

In this section, I shall attempt to argue that this particular experience may well be bound with a third, much more recent, formulation of the sublime; a formulation conceived by contemporary French philosopher, Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998). Again, as has been the case in the two previous sections, before I speak any further about the bow chime specifically, I would like briefly to sketch out some of the grounds of Lyotard's sublimity; a formulation documented in a number of his shorter texts and essays. These include his essay, 'Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?' - which features at the opening of his book, *The Postmodern Explained to Children: Correspondence 1982-1985* (1992). As well, the subject is mentioned in a number of lesser known texts, including, 'Newman: The Instant', 'The Sublime and the Avant-Garde', and 'After the Sublime: the state of aesthetics' - all of which feature in another of Lyotard's book, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (1991). Though I shall refer in passing to other works, my central concern here is with the essay 'After the Sublime' - an essay which, perhaps more than any other, directs its attentions towards the sublime in sound and music.

In contrast to those ideas presented in the previous discussions, Lyotard's account of the sublime amounts less to a complete overhaul of previous thoughts about the subject, and more to a refinement of older ideas. Most consistently perhaps, Lyotard

looks towards Kant's earlier definition of the sublime as the grounding for his own refinement of the notion.

His particular approach to the subject varies between each essay. However, in the particular case of his essay, 'After the Sublime', Lyotard approaches the Kantian theme of the sublime in terms of the relation between form and matter. He suggests: “One of the essential features revealed by Kant's analysis of the sublime depends on the disaster suffered by the imagination in the sublime sentiment … As every presentation consists in the 'forming' of the matter of the data, the disaster suffered by the imagination [in Kant's sublime] can be understood as the sign that the forms are not relevant” (Lyotard, 1991: 136). However, with a view to resolving this paradox of an aesthetics without sensible and imaginative forms, with a view to allowing matter to stand when the forms are no longer there to make it presentable, we already know that Kant ultimately turns toward the faculty of reason. Thus, “an Idea of Reason is revealed at the same time as the imagination proves to be impotent in *forming* data” (ibid).

Lyotard's sublime is ultimately sympathetic to the general premise of Kant's in that he maintains the sublime moment to involve a certain 'disaster' suffered by the mind; a disaster suffered in the confrontation with certain phenomena which seem 'unpresentable' to the mind in some way. However, he does hold some quite strong reservations concerning the ultimately reconciliatory appeal to reason featured in the Kantian schema – by which I mean the closing movement that reincorporates the unfathomable immensity of the (sublime) object back into the 'safe fold' of reason. For Lyotard, indeed, the sublime exists precisely because of the incommensurability between the (sublime) object and our ability to assimilate it; it exists precisely because of the absurdity spanning the gulf between the theoretical and the practical. The Kantian sublime – with its ultimately reconciliatory movement to reason – thus represents for Lyotard nothing short of nostalgic reverie for the lost contents of the sublime.

By contrast, in Lyotard's configuration, the sublime is considered to be that which does not lead us to expect the slightest reconciliation. It is that which, instead, exposes “a basic incommensurability within our experience that neither reason nor understanding is capable of resolving” (Sim, cited in Shaw, 2006: 123). In a further contrast to Kant's sublime and its stress upon an 'unpresentability' of form, Lyotard argues that in his sublime experience, “matter [itself] is invoked in a way that is not finalized, not destined” (Shaw, 2006: 124). In other words, in Lyotard's sublime, matter itself resists the imposition of concepts; it is the very thing itself which is withdrawn from the mind's grasp; it is, indeed, the very thing itself which is 'unpresentable'.

The sublime in question then is no longer the Kantian sublime. Where in the Kantian sublime the mind always arrives, belatedly as it were, to pronounce its judgement via the 'higher' faculty of reason, in Lyotard's, Judgement is ultimately kept open, unresolved. The object of the sublime, as Lyotard explains, “is not waiting for anything, it does not call on the mind … It is presence as unpresentable to the mind, always withdrawn from its grasp. It does not offer itself to dialogue and dialectic” (Lyotard, 1991: 142). Simplified to the extreme then, Lyotard's sublime might be considered akin to a disruptive event that forces critical thought to the point of crisis; which might suggest that the title of his essay, 'After the Sublime', means: “after the Kantian sublime … [it

means] another sublime – [a] sublime that can have no after, that cannot be the next stage in a sequence of moments" (Silverman, 2002: 228).

The strange and the sublime.

The notion and experience of 'the strange' – defined earlier as that which is unusual or surprising in a way that is unsettling or hard to understand – converges with Lyotard's notion of the sublime. As the idea of that which is strange, I suggested earlier, evokes an unnerving curiosity that could be said to represent a certain de-familiarisation with, or falling away from what can be known, seized, grasped, or perceived, so too does Lyotard's sublimity disrupt critical thought through invoking presence as unpresentable to the mind. However it is phrased, both cases suggest an unnerving moment; a moment when one's ability to properly grasp and understand one's experience is thrown into disarray. Lyotard's sublime then may seem poised to offer credence to sublimity in the particular case study of the bow chime outlined above. Still, it is worth first of all focusing our attentions upon Lyotard's more precise comments on his sublimity and its relation to sound.

We may have gathered from the review above that if a sound were to prompt sublimity in Lyotard's sense, then that sound would appear to the listener as presence unpresentable to the mind. As such, when considering the case of sublime sounds in 'After the Sublime', Lyotard directs his discussion towards 'unpresentable' sounds; sounds that do not turn towards the mind; sounds withdrawn from the mind's grasp. However, we must stress that such an 'unpresentability' represents something of a departure from that exhibited in the previous section on Kant, in which I found the form of the bow chime's lengthy drones to, as it were, evade the grasp of the mind. Indeed, in this instance, Lyotard is referring to a more inherent quality of sound: to its materiality; to its matter. He is referring, in other words, to an unpresentable matter of sound, or an 'immaterial' matter as he calls it (see, Lyotard, 1991: 140). Indeed, he is referring, in his words, to matter "for which the mind will not have been prepared, which will have unsettled it, and of which it conserves only the feeling – anguish and jubilation – of an obscure debt" (Lyotard, 1991: 141).

The particular focus of Lyotard's attention here is directed to what he calls a sound's 'nuance' and 'timbre'. These Lyotard defines as: "scarcely perceptible differences between sounds … which are otherwise identical in terms of the determination of their physical parameters" (Lyotard, 1991: 140). Nuance and timbre are, in other words, what differ and defer; what makes the difference between one note on one instrument and the same note on another, and thus what also defer the identification of that note. Also though, for Lyotard nuance and timbre allow the introduction of what he calls an 'infinite continuum' of variation and difference into the experience of listening to sound (see Lyotard, 1991: 139-140). As he suggests: whilst we can normally "manage to determine a [sound] … by specifying pitch, duration and frequency[,] ... timbre and nuance … are precisely what [can] escape this sort of determination" (ibid: 139). In their more obscure and unheard manifestation – Lyotard notes synthesizers and gongs as examples here –

nuance and timbre can indeed reveal to the listener the “distress and despair of the exact division ... of sounds … according to graded scales and harmonic temperaments” (ibid: 140). In this instance, they could well be defined as immaterial in presenting to the mind something for which it will not have been prepared; something unnervingly that does not fit into our current understanding of the world and the way it works.

This particular point is noteworthy given that in the present case study of the bow chime, the focus was similarly directed toward the unnerving, 'strange' timbre of the bow chime. Indeed, this particular account echoes many of Lyotard's assumptions as to how such an immaterial timbre will, as it were, reveal to the listener the distress and despair of exact divisions. The timbre, it was suggested, seemed to be 'poised between man and nature', 'halfway between a whale and a squadron bomber' – both sentiments which draw our attention towards the unknown and the unpresentable. They thus imply an unresolvable paradox; an impossible marriage between phenomena (a marriage between a whale and a squadron bomber); something that has slipped between divisions and categorisations, something that exists outside of our current systems of discourse as we know them. In Lyotard's terms, such a thing describes “a singular, incomparable quality” (Lyotard, 1991: 141). It describes “something which is not *addressed*, [something which] does not *address* itself to the mind” (ibid: 142). It is, surely, “the unpresentable in presentation itself” (Lyotard, 1992: 9). It is, surely, immaterial matter.

Is this it? Is it happening?

As we have gathered then, the bow chime's timbre reveals to the listener something unknown; it invokes the unpresentable in presentation itself. We might say, perhaps, that the timbre represents a stranger to consciousness; it represents something that dismantles consciousness, something that deposes consciousness and cannot be formulated by it. Encountering such a thing, we have established, represents a moment of sublimity in Lyotard's sense of the word: a disruptive moment in which critical thought is forced to the point of crisis. In closing this section though, we might like to comment upon one further and quite critical point in Lyotard's sublime: the sense of pleasure that such a moment involves.

In both of the previous discussions on Burke and Kant we might recall that sublimity has been suggested to involve a kind of contradictory sensation of pleasure and displeasure. So how, might we ask, does Lyotard's sublime moment compare?

In the Kantian sublime, the failure of the imagination represented the pretext for displeasure, whereas the reconciliatory action of reason was considered to involve pleasure. Given that Lyotard's sublime is directly derived from the Kantian formulation, and given also that his conceptualisation of the term stops short of including the reconciliatory action which for Kant is seen to give way to pleasure, one could be forgiven for presuming Lyotard's sublime to constitute simply a displeasing moment – a displeasing moment in which the mind simply fails to overcome the excesses of experience. Yet, much like Kant before him, Lyotard also considers his sublime moment to involve a feeling of displeasure alongside pleasure – though he obviously arrives at this

conclusion by quite different means. In fact, Lyotard is drawn here to an explanation closer in nature to the Burkean sublime.

We should recall from an earlier section that Burke diagnosed the source of the sublime as terror; a diagnosis that Lyotard suggests to reveal that, for Burke, "the sublime is kindled by the threat of nothing further happening" (Lyotard, 1991: 99). What is ultimately sublime for Burke, we should also recall though, is the feeling of delight in the face of danger; the knowledge that actual danger and pain – in whatever form that may take – is modified or mitigated by the effects of distance. Such a feeling embodies for Lyotard a sense of reassurance; a feeling, in his words, "that something *will* happen" (ibid: 84); a feeling that "despite everything within this threatening void … [that] something will [still] take place and will announce that everything is not over" (ibid).

So how does this relate to Lyotard's sublime? In his essay, 'The Sublime and the Avant-garde' (featured in his book, *The Inhuman* (1991)), Lyotard suggests the disruptive moment of his sublime to embody the properties of an 'event'. This is not, for Lyotard, "a major event in the media sense, [it is] not even a small event. [It is, rather, j]ust an occurrence" (Lyotard, 1991: 84). What Lyotard has in mind here is a kind of condition of liminality; a condition wherein an unknown phenomenon "*pends*, is imminent, contiguous to the world of the already present" (Edwards, 2002: 263). The sublime object represents, in other words, something unformed or something emerging; something that stands outside the frame set by the everyday but something that nevertheless seems to be making itself known. It represents, thus, a moment which is in the end "more a possibility or the promise of the event than the presence of one" (ibid: 262); and it represents a moment that, for Lyotard, prompts a series of questions: "*Is it happening, is this it, is it possible?*" (ibid: 90). More pertinently though, such an event is also seen to open up a space for disclosure. It indicates "the possibility of a new, different, 'inhuman' way of experiencing and thinking about the world" (Malpas, 2003: 48). It points towards new possibilities of though and action.

This point is significant as – like the Burkean sublime – it designates for the observer that something might happen; it invokes a feeling that something might take place and announce that everything is not over. Of course though, this relief is not directly tied to fears of pain and death as was the case for Burke. Rather, for Lyotard, such a moment relieves us, instead, from the kind of privation that "is lurking in the term *banality* – the fear that all we have is more of the same, recycled, a staled and wearied world attempting to delude itself with a constant parade of trashy "innovations"" (Edwards, 2002: 264). Herein thus lies the pleasure of Lyotard's sublime, and by extension, the pleasure of experiencing the bow chime's 'strange' timbre. As Lyotard explains, confronted by such a seemingly unformed and unfamiliar thing, the "possibility of nothing happening … [leads] to a feeling of anxiety" (Lyotard, 1991: 141). However, as he continues: its "suspense can also be accompanied by pleasure[;] ... pleasure in welcoming the unknown, and … the joy obtained by the intensification of being that the event brings with it" (ibid).

Undoubtedly, it is significant then that this particular case study of the bow chime represents a first encounter with the bow chime and its sound-timbre; a point, that is, when this particular timbre seemed unfamiliar to, and unassimilable within, one's stable

discursive orders. This represented a point, in other words, when this particular timbre seemed imminent, about-to-happen, on the fringe of coming into being in the world of the already present. As such, it represented a moment of potential disclosure: a relief from the endless proliferation of the same.

Summary.

To summarise, in this section I have suggested that sublimity could be aroused by a first encounter with the sound-timbre of the bow chime, a point when that sound-timbre seemed 'strange', unusual or surprising in a way that is unnerving and hard to understand. In this experience, it was noted how the mind 'scrambled for determinacy, to ascertain the sound's identity; to categorise it, order it and classify it', but it seemed simply 'incapable of achieving such a task'. The timbre seemed to be, instead, 'something other', 'something unknown', 'something that evades phrases'.

The stress upon the unknown and the unfamiliar presents striking relevance to a refined version of Kant's sublime by Jean-François Lyotard; a formulation in which an object is seen to expose a basic incommensurability within our experience that neither reason nor understanding is capable of resolving. In Lyotard's sublime moment, something is presented to the mind for which it is unprepared, which unsettles it. It invokes the unpresentable in presentation itself, and is seen to reveal new possibilities of thought and action in a way that relieves us from the feeling of the endless proliferation of the same. In the case of the bow chime, timbre is the main focus of attention here, and accordingly, the bow chime generates a timbre that does not seem to belong to anything, to anything other than itself; a timbre that cannot be defined or categorised, that 'speaks' of nothing, that announces nothing. Seemingly, there is almost nothing to 'consume'. It is, an immaterial timbre. A sublime timbre.

Conclusion.

The concern of this thesis has been with sublimity. Specifically, the sublimity of a certain sound, as heard in certain experiences, and produced by a certain playable sound-sculpture, the bow chime. Sublimity as a term signifies a contradictory sensation of pleasure and pain, a disjunctive moment in which experience slips out of conventional understanding. It represents a profound moment; a moment when words fail and points of comparison disappear; a moment when the mind grasps a feeling for what lies beyond thought and language. A moment of anxiety and joy, of tranquility and horror, of terror and delight, of failure and redemption, it is of such a moment, as found in the experience of the bow chime and its sound, that I have attempted to theorise in this work. I have observed three scenarios, each different in nature, and each drawing upon different types of experience or different aspects of the sound in question. Each experience, though, I have linked in some way to the notion of the sublime.

Overall, in this thesis I have perhaps formed three proposals as to the nature of the bow chime's sublimity:

- The first concerns the terror of loud sound, and considers sublimity (via Burke) as a mechanism related to self-preservation. My proposal here rests on the association between extreme, loud forms of sound – such as those we might encounter listening to the bow chime – and the notion of noise. I am following here a characterisation of noise by jacques Attali (1985), who considers the notion to represent sounds that disrupt and antagonise the resolve of order – in perhaps a similar way to a moment of chaos or anarchy. The experience of such sounds thus might be said to prompt, for the listener, a sense of danger, horror or terror.

  In the experience of the bow chime's sound though – which, likewise, is often extremely loud and 'noisy' – such a sensation of terror may give way to a feeling of delight. This feeling arises in the realisation that the particular sound – or more accurately, the particular noise – in question is couched in various codes and conventions and so is, in a way, ritualised. Realising that the terror of noise is ritualised thus provides a sense of reassurance; a sense of safety and security; a feeling that any actual danger is held back or suspended. As such – following Burke's sublime – the listener feels energised and invigorated having managed and survived a potentially threatening experience.

- The second proposal alternatively concerns the often prolonged length of the bow chime's sound, and considers sublimity (via Kant) as related to the incomprehension of boundaries and forms. My proposal in this case rests upon a characterisation of the bow chime's tone as extended to the point whereby the mind becomes lost. By this I mean to say that the sound is so prolonged that, when attempting to discern the duration of its length, the mind looses all grasp upon its perceptions, and the sound consequently appears unbounded and formless – it seems to extend forever. A frustrating moment in which one's imagination fails to cohere and properly discern the excesses of experience, the listener is thus forced to conceive the seemingly 'unbounded' phenomenon through the higher ideas of reason – ideas such as the infinite, the unbounded, the formless and such. This disjunctive moment gives rise to a kind of cleavage within the subject between what can be presented (that is, imagined) and what can be conceived. However – following Kant's sublime – such a moment in turn serves as a kind of pleasurable awakening to the abilities of the mind to grasp the unimaginable.

- Lastly, the third and final proposal concerns a certain 'strangeness' of timbre, and considers sublimity (via Lyotard) as a disruptive moment in which critical thought is forced to the point of crisis. My proposal in this final case rests upon the timbre generated by the bow chime being seen as strange and unfamiliar; that is, as unusual or surprising in a way that is unsettling or hard to understand. The timbre, in other words, is seen as something that consciousness cannot formulate, as something that has somehow slipped between divisions and categorisations, and that exists outside of our current systems of discourse as we know them. The experience of such a moment exposes a basic incommensurability in one's experience that neither reason nor understanding is capable of resolving. However – following Lyotard's sublime – such an experience procures a certain pleasure in welcoming the unknown and the new.

These proposals, then, indicate a number of ways that the notion of the sublime may relate to the bow chime: they outline the mechanisms that underlie various sublime encounters with its sound, and so form a number of proposals as to the nature of its sublimity. I should perhaps stress at this closing juncture though a point already made earlier: that these proposals are not intended to be strictly accurate or reliable in every encounter with this sound or each of its specific characteristics, but are, rather, simply 'rules of thumb'. These proposals, in other words, represent educated guesses as to the nature of the sound's sublimity as based upon a selection of my own experiences with it. They represent a broadly accurate guide as to the sound's sublimity; a guide that very well might account for others' 'sublime' experiences of it.

Though these proposals may well not always be readily applicable and accurate, in this guide we do at least begin to see emerge a new sense of clarity and understanding of this sound and our experience of it. We begin to define it; to categorise it; to

understand it. Each proposal sets forth its own definitions, its own concerns, and its own significance – which no doubt can be explored further in the future. Yet overall, each also finds the sound, in its own individual way, as a profound, intense experience; an experience that destabilises us, that unsettles us, that haunts us. Indeed, if we have learnt anything from this work at all, then surely it must be this: that the experience of this sound is bound to the (sublime) spectacle; that experiencing this sound can tap into fundamental hopes and fears; that, indeed, experiencing this sound can rock us to our very core.

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